

EXHIBITS

A Renaissance Homage to Science and Art

The May 21 opening of the *Gubbio Studiolo* from the Palace of Duke Federico da Montefeltro at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has created enormous excitement, especially among lovers of the Renaissance period. After almost thirty years in storage, this extraordinary work of art—made by woodworkers in Renaissance Florence—can now be seen by visitors from all over the world, an event made all the more important by there being only two such artifacts known in

the entire world. Only five are known to have been built at all, of which three were destroyed during World War II, and the Gubbio Studiolo is the only one in the Western hemisphere.

The Studiolo is a small, decorated study, used as a private retreat in the palace at Gubbio of the Duke of Urbino, Federico da Montefeltro. It provided a place where Federico could concentrate on intellectual pursuits and receive private visitors. Measuring 16 ft. 10 in. by 12 ft. 9 in., with a ceiling height of 17 ft. 5 in., its walls are covered with panels fashioned by a woodworking technique called *intarsia*, which arrived in Europe from the Islamic world beginning approximately the Tenth century A.D., and was further developed in early Fifteenth-century Florence. *Intarsia* cutters used the wood of about fifteen species of indigenous Italian trees, to create astonishing, three-dimensional *trompe l'oeil* images.



Interior of the recently restored Gubbio Studiolo, showing intarsia panelling.

The Gubbio Studiolo was originally built between 1478 and 1483, as part of the expansion of the Ducal palace that began in 1476 under the patronage of Federico (1422-1482). The panels were designed to effect the illusion of an interior with open cupboards, in which are depicted books, musical and scientific instruments, Federico's coat of arms, pieces of armor, etc. The wooden panels surround the room on all sides, rising to a height of 8 ft. 9 in.

Above the panelling, a series of paintings were installed on the long side facing the windows, and on the two short ends. A Latin inscription, couched in classical hexameters and pentameters, was carved in gilded letters against a blue background that runs around all the walls of the room, between the *intarsia* panels and the paintings hung above them. It reads: *Aspicis. Eternos. Venerande. Matris. Alumnos. Doctrina. Excelsos. Ingenioque. Viros. Ut. Nuda.*

Cervice. Cadant. Ante [Ora parentis] Supplic. Iter. Flexo. Procubuere. Genu. Iustitia. Pietas. Vincit. Reverenda. Nec. Ullum. Poenitet. Altrici. Succubuisse. Sue. ("See how the eternal students of the venerable mother, men exalted in learning and in genius, fall forward, suppliantly with bared neck and flexed knee, before the face of their parent. Their reverend piety prevails over justice and none repents for having yielded to his foster mother.")

The Latin text is related to the oil-on-poplar paintings, representing the seven Liberal Arts, which were hung in the Studiolo, of which two are now in the collection of the National Gallery in London. All the paintings depict a male figure kneeling before a beautiful woman. For example, in the painting representing *Astronomy*, the male figure kneels before the lady, and offers her an armillary sphere. The Studiolo's long wall was occupied by the language arts of the Trivium: *Rhetoric* in the center, flanked by *Grammar* and *Dialectic*. The two short walls exhibited the mathematical arts of the Quadrivium: above the entrance, *Astronomy* beside *Geometry*, and, on the opposite short wall, *Music* beside *Arithmetic*.

Federico da Montefeltro, A Renaissance Man

Federico commissioned two such studiolo: one at the Ducal palace in Urbino, completed in 1476, and the one in Gub-



"Astronomy." The allegorical painting of one of the seven Liberal Arts, now in Berlin, once graced the walls of the Studiolo; it prominently features an armillary sphere.

bio, which was assigned to the workshop of Giuliano da Maiano, among the most celebrated Florentine *intarsiatori* of the Fifteenth century. This was the time of Filippo Brunelleschi's development of linear perspective. Federico, a close friend of the famous architect Leon Battista Alberti and of the Sienese humanist Pope, Pius II, "made of Urbino the center of a cultivated society which rivaled that of Lorenzo the Magnificent and his Florence in attracting and helping poets, scholars, and artists," reports Vincenzo Labella in his book, *A Season of Giants, 1492-1508*.

It was in Urbino, a few miles north of Gubbio, in the Umbria region of Italy, that the great Raphael Sanzio was born in 1483, the year after Federico's death. Raphael's father, Giovanni di Santi di Pietro, was a painter and poet at the court of the Montefeltro, and a close friend of the artist Piero della Francesca. (Piero painted a well-known, magnificent altarpiece for the Montefeltro in 1469-72, showing Federico kneeling on the right of the Madonna and Child, surrounded by saints and angels.)

Thus, the young Raphael grew up surrounded by the love of knowledge, art, and beauty, as he walked through the corridors and hallways of the Ducal palace at Urbino—a palace, designed for Federico by the architect Luciano Laurana, which is itself considered "a masterpiece that stands as one of the greatest edifices of the Renaissance." Raphael was so proud of his birthplace that he signed two of his works, the *Wedding of the Holy Virgin* and the *Deposition from the Cross*, Raphael Urbinas.

Measure and Proportion

The beautiful Spring 1996 *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* is dedicated to this extraordinary masterpiece, and the work undertaken for its restoration. (The Studiolo has been restored three times: first, between 1874 and 1877; second, in 1938; and now, the recently completed restoration, performed under the direction of Antoine M. Wilmering and Olga Raggio.)

The *Bulletin* reports Federico's high regard for mathematics and geometry: "In a famous passage he issued to Laurana, he stated that in his view mathe-

matics and geometry, being based on scientific truths, are 'the most important of the Liberal Arts, as well as the very foundation of architecture.'" Among the objects portrayed in the cabinets, pride of place is given to scientific and musical instruments.

The inside back cover of this issue of *Fidelio* shows details of a number of the panels in the Gubbio Studiolo, along with a contemporary portrait of Federico and a humanist scholar. You can see, in the upper left corner inside one cabinet, dividers, a cittern, an hourglass, and behind them, a plumb bob and set square. All four, including the musical cittern, are instruments of measurement and proportion. A facing panel depicts, along with a brass candlestick, more musical instruments: a harp, a jingle ring, and a tuning key.

—Ana Maria Mendoza



Facade (above) and interior courtyard (left) of the other Ducal palace, at Urbino, which was designed by the architect Luciano Laurana. The palace was a haunt of the artist Raphael in his youth.